



FEMA

# About the National Exercise Program (NEP)

## NEP History

*Six national exercises involving senior-level officials have been completed since 2000. Prior to 2009, these exercises were called Top Officials Exercises, or TOPOFFS, and focused primarily on terrorist attacks. Following the establishment of the NEP and the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Act (PKEMRA), TOPOFFs evolved into the current National Level Exercise (NLE) series, which encompasses both natural and man-made disasters.*

## The NLE Series

*NLEs are part of the five-year series developed by the NEP, a schedule of exercises categorized into four tiers which reflect priorities for participation and outline the procedures for departments and agencies to follow should they want to nominate an exercise to a national-level status. Each year, one exercise is designated as the NLE / Tier I event requiring senior-level participation among the Federal interagency community.*

### National Level Exercise 2011 (NLE 11)

- NLE 11 will be a functional exercise centered on the scenario of a catastrophic earthquake in the New Madrid Seismic Zone (NMSZ).
- NLE 11 is the largest U.S. exercise to date, encompassing four FEMA Regions (IV, V, VI, and VII) and eight Central U.S. States: Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Illinois, Indiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Tennessee.
- To be conducted May 16–20, 2011, NLE 11 will exercise initial incident response and recovery capabilities and test and validate existing plans, policies, and procedures, including the Federal Interagency Response Plan – Earthquake (FIRP-E) and State and regional New Madrid catastrophic plans.

### National Level Exercise 2010 (NLE 10)

- Occurred May 17–18, 2010.
- NLE 10 engaged Federal, State, and local partners in a series of events and opportunities to demonstrate and assess Federal emergency preparedness capabilities pertaining to a simulated terrorist attack scenario involving an improvised nuclear device (IND).

### National Level Exercise 2009 (NLE 09)

- Occurred July 27–31, 2009.
- First major exercise conducted by the United States Government that focused exclusively on terrorism prevention and protection, as opposed to incident response and recovery.

#### NLEs At-A-Glance

- NLE 11 is the first to be centered on a natural hazard.
- Previous NLEs focused on terrorism prevention and a simulated terrorist attack involving an improvised nuclear device (IND).
- NLEs involve officials ranging from local police officers to the President of the United States.
- With each successive exercise in the NLE program, coordination and cooperation are enhanced, creating continuous improvements in the preparedness effort.

# Top Officials (TOPOFF) Exercise Series

*The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's (DHS') Top Officials (TOPOFF) Exercise was a congressionally mandated two-year cycle of seminars, planning events, and exercises designed to strengthen the Nation's capacity to prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from large-scale terrorist attacks. Each cycle culminated in a full-scale exercise that simulated a coordinated terrorist attack involving weapons of mass destruction (WMD).*

## TOPOFF 4: Increasing Coordination through Collaboration

- Conducted in October 2007, TOPOFF 4 took place in Portland, OR; Phoenix, AZ.; and for the first time, the U.S. territory of Guam, as well as Washington, D.C., for Federal partners.
- The exercise built on past lessons learned while adding new goals, including: an increased level of coordination with U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) exercises to combat global terrorism, closer cooperation with the private sector, an expanded emphasis on prevention, a deeper focus on mass decontamination and long-term recovery and remediation issues, and strengthened coordination and communications with international allies.
- More than 15,000 participants representing Federal, State, territorial, and local entities, as well as the governments of Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom, participated in the exercise.
- All venues responded to a radiological dispersal device (RDD) attack.

## TOPOFF 3: Exercising National Preparedness

- Conducted in April 2005, TOPOFF 3 was the first test of the National Response Plan (NRP) and National Incident Management System (NIMS).
- TOPOFF 3 continued to evolve and included an increased focus on bolstering international and private sector participation, terrorism prevention activities, risk communication and public information functions, and long-term recovery and remediation issues.
- Over 10,000 participants, including responders and officials from Canada and the United Kingdom, responded to a simulated chemical attack in New London, CT, and a biological attack in the State of New Jersey.
- The exercise marked the launch of a new simulated media tool—the interactive Web site VNN.com.

## TOPOFF 2: Assessing Homeland Security Planning

- Conducted in May 2003, TOPOFF 2 was the first national exercise following the September 11, 2001, attacks and was led by the newly formed Department of Homeland Security (DHS).
- TOPOFF 2 provided the first opportunity for DHS to exercise its organizational functions and assets, including tests of the Homeland Security Advisory System (HSAS).
- Participants in Seattle, WA, faced a simulated RDD attack, while those in the Chicago, IL, faced a biological attack.
- The exercise engaged 8,500 responders and top officials from the United States and Canada—the first international partner to participate.

### TOPOFFs At-A-Glance

- There were four TOPOFF exercises, and they took place between 2000 and 2007.
- TOPOFF was mandated by Congress in an effort to engage top officials in the decision-making processes they would face in a real-world disaster—from public health concerns to communications issues among agencies and the media.
- Each TOPOFF built on lessons learned from previous exercises and real-world disasters, thus ensuring that participants faced successively more sophisticated and challenging exercises.

### **TOPOFF 2000: Coordinated, Strategic National Response**

- In May 2000, the Department of Justice (DOJ), the Department of State (DOS), and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) led the first exercise in the TOPOFF series.
- The primary goal of the exercise was to improve the capability of government officials and agencies, both within the United States and abroad, to provide an effective, coordinated, and strategic response to a terrorist attack.
- More than 6,500 Federal, State, and local personnel—including top officials—responded to a simulated biological attack in Denver, CO, and a simulated chemical attack in Portsmouth, NH.
- The exercise introduced a new element in preparedness exercises: a simulated media outlet known as the Virtual News Network (VNN). VNN kept players up-to-date on unfolding events and forced decision makers to face the challenge of communicating with real-world media in a crisis.